

A History of Beach School  
Nyleptha Granger-Ford

Beach School is situated on Lummi Island which is in the extreme southern part of School District No. 502, Whatcom County, Washington. The island is approximately nine miles long and between one and one half miles wide. Only the northern half of the island is arable however, as Lummi Mountain occupies the southern half.

Lummi Island was first created as a separate school district on December 17th, 1887. The district had been part of the Marietta district and was now assigned the number, Beach School No. 32. The first three school directors appointed by the County Superintendent of Schools Mrs. Nellie S. Coupe, were: Christian Tuttle, Jonathan Harper and John Fulton.

Having failed to hold school three months in two years, the district was annulled and so reverted back to Marietta School District No. 16 from whence it came. The reasons for school not being held were not given at the County Superintendent's office.

The first industry on the island was the harvesting of the magnificent Douglas Fir trees that grew to the waters edge. After the logging business was fairly well established, the timber harvesters from the State of Michigan sent for their families.

Eleven families came from Michigan in 1887, the Melzer-Grangers, the McMurchys, the Sicklesteels, the Crabtrees, W. S. Rembaugh, Charles R. Norman, the Sterling Nugents, Henry Nugents, William Warrens, John Warrens and the Baccus family. The Sicklesteels, Sterling Nugents, William and John Warrens and the Baccus family left the island after a few years.

The necessity of having a school for the Lummi Island children was most apparent. On November 5th, 1887, a petition was presented by Frederick F. Lane and John H. Reed asking for the reestablishment of Lummi Island as a separate school district. The petition was granted December 17th, 1887. The following officers were appointed by the Whatcom County Superintendent of Schools J. F. Griffin, to serve as directors; Albion F. Bowden, Frederick F. Lane and Donald McMurchy, and as clerk, W. S. Rembaugh. The new district was named Beach School District No. 32. It was named for the small town and steamboat landing located on the south shore of Hales Passage. It had been named for the original homesteader, Wade H. Beach, who settled and filed on a homestead there, November 20, 1884, Mr. Beach was also the first Postmaster of the US Post Office at Beach. He carried the mail in his sloop, "The Rover", from the town of Whatcom at the head of Bellingham Bay in North Puget Sound.

The length of school term was three months, and school was usually held in the summer time. The first teacher of this school located at Beach Landing was Charles R. Norman whose salary was \$45 per month. Miss Delia Baccus was the second teacher, her salary was \$35 per month. Other early teachers were Laura Smith, Rose E. Rogers, George R. Austin, Maude Edens, M. J. Splane, Rose Wilson, Mellie Sheldon and Tryphena Warren.

The entrance of the Washington Territory into the Union as the State of Washington brought changes to the school on Lummi Island. In 1892, a representative of the staff of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction condemned the log school house so it was abandoned. The logs from this first school building were used in the construction of "The Grange" which for many years was a popular summer resort on the north end of the island owned by Melzer and Fannie Winslow Granger.

They operated this popular resort and eating place at Point Migley from 1900 until 1918.

The site of the second school house was on the arable part of the island, where the Nugent Road crosses the island. This acre tract was donated for the consideration of one dollar to School District No. 32 by Theodore Peterson. The deed was filed April 9, 1892 and specified no restrictions.

A one room frame building was erected, made of machine sawed boards. To finance this new building, the school district sold bonds amounting to \$1000, one which the rate of interest was eight percent. The average daily attendance for the first year was 27, (17 boys and 10 girls). The total seating capacity of the school-room was 45.

As the island continued to attract settlers the school population increased. The settlers spread over the island. Now it became difficult for some of the younger pupils to get to and from school.

During the winter Libby and Beulah Nugent with their brother Melzer, Children of Henry Nugent and Irene Granger Nugent, started out from the north end of the island carrying a lighted lantern at 6 a.m. As they continued on the four and one-half miles they had to walk to school, they hid the lantern at daylight in a hollow stump along the forest trail. They would leave school at four o'clock for the return trip, get their lantern out of the stump, light it and get home around 6 p.m., having covered a distance of nine miles. For them, attending school was a twelve hour ordeal in those years 1895 and onward.

By 1909 a real problem existed in that a school house located at either extreme end of the island would be a prohibitive distance for any small child to walk if he chanced to live at the opposite end of the island. To alleviate this problem, the families living at the North End were given permission by the County Superintendent to establish a school.

A 16 x 20 foot chicken coop, located at the rear of the Frank Taft's property, was donated for the school's use. It was white washed and renovated by adding a small porch reached by three-step stairs. A twelve inch brass bell from the Alsop fish trap was mounted on a 4 x 6 beam by the door at the side of the porch. The two short rows of wide desks accommodating two children each with benches for seats all but filled the small but pleasant room. It was heated by a tall black stove. A table with a bucket and dipper by the door furnished drinking water. A two-hole toilet outside and behind the building were also white washed, a necessary addition to the premises. Five children attended this school.

Elisabeth Warren was the first teacher. The five students were Ted and Wesley Oakes, Maurine Taft, Nyleptha Granger, and Salena Tomaa (Lummi Indian girl). Nyleptha Granger-Ford attended this school 1909-1911.

Nellie Patton and Hazel Breakey were the second and third teachers. During these three years the enrollment grew to fifteen students which caused considerable crowding. This was an integrated school as Lummi Indian children attended this school as well. The Lummi Indian Reservation was located across Hales Passage on the mainland, but the parents of these Indian children lived and worked at the Carlisle fish cannery located at Village Point on Lummi Island.

In 1911, C. R. Granger donated for a consideration of one dollar, an acre of land for a school site, which was located on the Blizzard Road at the north end of the island. The deed specified that "it was to be used for a school and for literary purposes only. If used otherwise the title would revert to the donor or his heirs".

A one room school building was constructed on this new site in 1912 and it was called the "North End School." This distinguished the building from the one that already existed, which then became the "South End School". It was also an integrated school as there were Japanese students attending whose parents worked at the cannery. One was a high school boy who could paint beautifully. He came to school to learn the English language. Ghaska D. J. Baker, a very colorful and distinguished Indian woman of Stallcup, Oklahoma, was the first teacher in the North End School.

Even though there were now two school buildings located at opposite ends of the arable part of the island, each was only a one room school. All grades were taught by one teacher in each school. Ten minutes was the usual time allotted to each class recitation. The daily program called for thirty or more separate recitations. School called at nine in the morning and held until four p.m. with two fifteen minute recesses morning and afternoon and a forty five minute noon recess.

The importance of the fishing industry on the island led to the construction of large fish canneries. Dozens of new families made new homes there. This coupled with the fact that sons and daughters of the original settlers now had families of school age caused the school enrollment to rise rapidly. Another room was added to the South End School and advanced courses given for the first three years of High School began in 1916. These children attended: Gladys and Ruth Bucholz, Frances Bowden, Maurine Taft and Nyleptha Granger.

Glenara Sherwood (Austin) was the teacher.

The curriculum for the High School Department consisted of Latin, Two years of algebra, geometry, American history, and one commercial course. After completing the eleventh grade on the island, the students usually finished the fourth year of high school study in Bellingham.

Mary Bond taught the eight grades in the older part of the South End School building. The total school enrollment was now 92, 35 in the North End School in eight grades; 52 in the South End School in eight grades and 5 students in the High School.

By 1919 the High School was closed at the South End School. World War I had had its effect, many families left the island and the school population dropped.

Fire of an unknown origin razed the South End School building. There was no fire equipment on the island. For the remainder of the year and until May of 1920, school was held in the basement of the Congregational Church, located a half mile west of the burned school site on the Nugent Road. Nothing had been saved from the building, so much improvisation was done to provide facilities, although books were brought in from the County Superintendent's office in Bellingham.

At this time, School District No. 32 was wealthy because the revenue raised from the assessment of the three canneries and the fish traps in the adjacent waters plus the large population provided the money to build a large "modern" building.

After much discussion both pro and con, the majority favored a consolidation of the schools somewhere near the central point of the island. The building of well graded roads on the island would make travel easier and made the argument for consolidation stronger. This point of view eventually won the day.

On February 20, 1920, the Lummi Island Township board deeded a five acre tract of land to Beach School District No. 32 in exchange for the South End School site. This property is located on the eastern side of the island about halfway between the North and South End school on the Centerview Road about a mile west of the very first Beach School location of 1887.

On this site a school building consisting of two large classrooms with wide cloak rooms, a library room, a kitchen, and a large gymnasium was constructed in 1920. The School District had sufficient funds to do an adequate job as the tax raised in the past from the large population and fish canneries was great.

Now the 46 children were happy to attend this new central building that was again named "Beach School". All the children could walk to this school, none lived more than two miles away and the rivalry between the North and South End Schools faded away into general concern for the good of all.

Ruth Hall and Laura Martin were the first teachers in this new Beach School for the term 1920-'21. In 1921-'22, Mrs. C. B. Bayes of Lynden and Nyleptha Granger of Lummi Island were the second pair hired to teach grades one through eight. Mrs. Bayes was the upper grade teacher. There were 48 children attending, rather evenly divided in two rooms. In 1921 a special levy of four mills to finance a first year of high school and three mills for the general fund for the grade school, was

passed. Permission to hold high school classes was not granted.

A financial tragedy hit School District 32 in the spring of 1922. The County Superintendent of Schools withdrew \$10,000.00 from the District Funds held by the County Auditor. School has to close at the end of 8 months because of lack of funds. A new law passed by the State legislature disallowed funds being held over from unexpended budgets. These funds were to be allotted to school districts with low assessed valuation, of which there were many in the County.

By now Lummi Island's population had decreased and the fish canneries were closing because of poor salmon runs. School funds evaporated. The School Board of District No. 32 was furious but helpless at this state of affairs. Teachers were not available at the miserable salaries the Board could offer. Only one teacher was hired at \$60.00 per month, when the salaries they had been paying were twice that. Living quarters were arranged at the school for the teachers but they were drafty and barn like and most miserable. The teachers had to do their own janitor work.

On November 3, 1936, a special levy of \$400.00 was raised to provide the necessary transportation of the island children to Bellingham High School. Seven high school children walked to the ferry landing at Beach, ferried across Hales Passage and caught a bus which took them to Bellingham High School.

With the county reorganization of the school districts in 1941, Beach School District No. 32 became a part of the Ferndale District No. 502. Since that time both the junior and senior high school students are transported by bus to Alexander Junior High and the Senior High School at Ferndale. The School District furnished a bus to gather the students from around the island and transport them via the ferry "Whatcom



Chief' to Gooseberry Point, where they transferred to the Ferndale High School bus each school day at 7:20 a.m. Pupils in the first six grades attended Beach School. Nyleptha Granger-Ford taught school in this new arrangement at Beach after the consolidation, 1941-1949.

L. A. Ford was the first school bus driver. He made two trips a day around the island. The first trip beginning at 6:20 a.m. from the Beach School garage. The bus carried 22 children to the 7:00 a.m. ferry, crossed the pass on the ferry and then transferred the students to the Ferndale High School bus. The bus then returned to Beach School. At 8:20 a.m. the school bus made a second trip to transport the grade school children to Beach School at 9:00 a.m. In the afternoon, the bus started out taking the Beach School children at 3:20 p.m. and delivering them home on the way to the 4:00 ferry where it was cross over to Gooseberry Point to meet the Ferndale bus for picking up the Lummi Island children and returning to the island taking home the high school students, arriving back at the Beach School garage at 5:15 p.m. For 22 years, Mr. Ford drove the bus more than 200,000 miles without an accident.

The school population dwindled to a low level of children in the grades and the fear of losing the school altogether was great. However, the beauty of the area brought new settlers looking for retirement property, but never the gain during the boom years of the fish canneries.